

**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

# Memorandum

Date: May 27, 2009

From: Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N)

Subj: Requirements for VA Medical Center and VISN Activity Focused on Justice-Involved Veterans;  
Announcement of Veterans Justice Outreach National Steering Committee

To: Network Director (10N1-23)

1. VA is making a system-wide effort to ensure access to services for the justice-involved Veteran population at risk for homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness, and physical health problems (see Attachment 1, Under Secretary for Health's Information Letter 10-2009-05). A justice-involved Veteran is:
  - a. A Veteran in contact with local law enforcement who can be appropriately diverted from arrest into mental health or substance abuse treatment;
  - b. A Veteran in a local jail, either pretrial or serving a sentence; or
  - c. A Veteran involved in adjudication or monitoring by a court.

This memorandum details required justice-focused activity at the medical center and VISN level, and requests volunteers for the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) National Steering Committee.

2. A growing number of communities have established treatment courts, including Veterans, Drug and Mental Health Courts; these courts address the issues of defendants with specific needs or circumstances not adequately handled in the traditional court system, and often reduce justice system operating costs by lowering rates of re-incarceration. Veterans' Courts connect Veteran defendants with needed services in a supportive, Veteran-focused environment encouraging adherence to treatment.
3. Law enforcement Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) are another promising avenue for connecting justice-involved Veterans with needed mental health and other services. In Memphis, Tennessee, and other communities using the Memphis Model, VA clinicians train law enforcement personnel on Veteran-specific issues, including PTSD and TBI, to inform encounters with Veterans in crisis.
4. VA medical centers must now provide outreach to justice-involved Veterans in the communities they serve. In communities where justice programs relevant to Veterans exist (Veterans courts, Drug Courts, Mental Health Courts, and CITs), VA will take the initiative in building working relationships to see that eligible justice-involved Veterans get needed care. In communities where no such programs exist, VA will reach out to potential justice system partners (judges,

Requirements for VA Medical Center and VISN Activity Focused on Justice-Involved Veterans; Announcement of Veterans Justice Outreach National Steering Committee

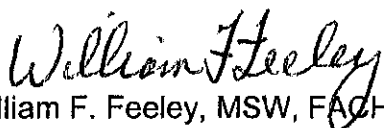
prosecutors, police and jail administrators) to connect eligible justice-involved Veterans with VA services. VA medical centers must also ensure that VA Police located at their facilities have received training on Veteran-specific issues.

5. Each VA medical center must designate a VJO Specialist, who will play an active role in the facility's mental health governance structure. The VJO Specialist will be responsible for direct outreach, assessment, and case management for justice-involved Veterans in local courts and jails, and liaison with local justice system partners. The Specialist will provide or coordinate training for law enforcement personnel, beginning with VA Police, on Veteran-specific issues. VJO Specialists will be licensed independent practitioners (psychologists, social workers or nurses will be appropriate) and will work in both medical center and justice system settings. Specialists will assist in eligibility determination and enrollment, function as members of court treatment teams using interventions appropriate for the justice-involved Veteran population (e.g., Motivational Interviewing), and refer and link Veterans to appropriate VA and non-VA services. VJO Specialists will participate in program monitoring and evaluation activity conducted by NEPEC; implementation metrics will be forthcoming.
6. Serving the justice-involved Veteran population presents unique clinical and logistical challenges; training for VJO Specialists must therefore be a priority. Specialists will participate in one of four regional VJO training sessions, approximately a week in length, to begin in late FY 09 or early FY 10. Faculty for these sessions will be drawn in part from court and VA staff currently working on justice-involved Veterans' issues.
7. Veterans Justice Outreach is organized as a Homeless program within the Office of Mental Health Services (OMHS); the Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Operations and Management will provide operational oversight. Medical Centers must communicate their VJO Specialist designations to Sean Clark ([Sean.Clark2@va.gov](mailto:Sean.Clark2@va.gov)) in OMHS by June 24, 2009, along with the amount of that individual's time to be devoted to VJO activities (expressed in FTEE). Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) Specialists are not appropriate candidates for this role; responses designating HCRV Specialists will be returned for reconsideration. Interested parties, particularly those with justice system experience, are invited to volunteer for the VJO National Steering Committee. This committee, to be chaired by the Deputy Chief Patient Care Services Officer for Mental Health, will provide counsel and direction for VHA's involvement with justice system partners. Network and facility directors, facility chiefs of staff, and chiefs of psychiatry are particularly encouraged to participate. Potential volunteers should contact Sean Clark by June 24, 2009. The Steering Committee will have approximately 12 members, including VHA's Chief Officer for Legislative, Regulatory, and Intergovernmental Affairs; the VHA Executive will approve the committee's membership no later than June 30, 2009.
8. Each VISN will host a monthly VJO Specialists' conference call, moderated by

Requirements for VA Medical Center and VISN Activity Focused on Justice-Involved Veterans; Announcement of Veterans Justice Outreach National Steering Committee

the Deputy VISN Director. This call will serve as a forum for sharing successes and challenges in working with the justice system, and for the dissemination of best practices. An initial call will orient Deputy VISN Directors to VJO issues.

9. If you have questions, you may contact Jim McGuire, Program Manager, HCRV at 310-478-3711, ext. 41450, or Sean Clark, Presidential Management Fellow, Office of Mental Health Services, at 202-461-7311. Thank you for your continued support of Mental Health programs, particularly for your dedication to providing services for the justice-involved Veteran population.



William F. Feeley, MSW, FACHE